

Education Section

The International Society for Complementary Medicine Research (ISCMR): the Way Forward

George T Lewith¹ and Marja J Verhoef²

¹Reader in Complementary Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK and ²Professor in Complementary Medicine, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

This article describes the birth and development of the International Society for Complementary Medicine Research (ISCMR) from its inception in 2003. The society's main function is to facilitate the development of CAM research internationally and to use its networks, website, newsflashes and newsletters to communicate with its members and bring CAM researchers together from all over the world.

The International Society For Complementary Medicine Research (ISCMR): the Way Forward

The birth of ISCMR—Progress so far

Over the past 5 years momentum has developed among CAM researchers around their perceived need for an international complementary medicine research society in order to facilitate an exchange of ideas about CAM research, within a formal structure, in an international context. Consequently a small international planning committee was formed that was instrumental in making ISCMR a reality at the 10th Annual Symposium of Complementary Health Care. ISCMR was described in broad principle as 'an international scientific organization of researchers, practitioners and policy makers that fosters Complementary and integrative medicine research and provides a platform for knowledge and information exchange to enhance international communication and collaboration'. It was established as a non-profit organization, which limits the range of services and benefits it is able to offer. However, over the past 2 years, we have succeeded in developing a solid infrastructure around a growing membership, including a website, the publication of regular quarterly newsletters and almost weekly newsflashes, as well as partnerships with a variety of organizations including the Research Council for

Complementary Medicine in the UK and the major peer-reviewed CAM journals. Members have enthusiastically responded to requests for book reviews which from now on will be published in our newsletters. Members are also beginning to realize that our secure website with an available and willing network of researchers can be used to find contact information, individuals who can peer-review or become research collaborators. The website itself has great potential to offer protected areas for communication and discussion.

The two annual general meetings to date, and indeed our workshop at the 2005 Annual Meeting, have taken place in the context of the Annual Symposium of Complementary Health Care ('the Exeter meeting') in the UK. While we have been very grateful that the conference organizers have hosted our efforts to date, we need to reach out to other parts of the world and connect with different international groups involved in research if we are true to our international mandate. Consequently our next meeting will be held in conjunction with the North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine (IM-Conf-2006) in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (May 24–27, 2006). This conference is sponsored by the Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine, which consists of 29 leading academic medical centers from across North America. IM-Conf-2006 represents the first occasion that all 29 North American academic Consortium centers and other leading national and international CAM networks and organizations will come together to meet and share their research. It will offer a dynamic and creative environment for establishing

For reprints and all correspondence: G. T. Lewith, Complementary Medicine Research Unit, Aldermoor Health Centre, Aldermoor Close, Southampton SO16 5ST, UK. Tel: +44 02380 241073; Fax: +44 02380 701125
E-mail: jbb2@soton.ac.uk

© The Author (2006). Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

The online version of this article has been published under an open access model. Users are entitled to use, reproduce, disseminate, or display the open access version of this article for non-commercial purposes provided that: the original authorship is properly and fully attributed; the Journal and Oxford University Press are attributed as the original place of publication with the correct citation details given; if an article is subsequently reproduced or disseminated not in its entirety but only in part or as a derivative work this must be clearly indicated. For commercial re-use, please contact journals.permissions@oxfordjournals.org

international research collaboration and strengthening partnerships with organizations such as the US National Institutes of Health-funded National Center for CAM Research (NCCAM). The funding streams from the Bernard Osher Foundation, the Bravewell Collaborative, the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation and the US National Institutes of Health will allow ISCMR to work with US and Canadian partners in Edmonton to create an essential international perspective for their endeavors.

Future Plans

There are many ways in which the Society can facilitate research development. The first is making information available through discounted journals that we offer through our Society and linked databases. For instance, subscription to FACT through the Society will allow entry into the archived FACT database, which is now 10 years old, as well as a number of conventional pharmaceutical journals. The availability of such databases through the Society represents an important asset. Second, special interest groups should be at the heart of our Society. The ISCMR-sponsored qualitative methods workshop in Exeter (2005) led by Elaine Weatherley-Jones provided a very valuable introduction to the main areas that qualitative research has to offer to a complex field such as CAM. We hoped that this workshop will develop into a dynamic ISCMR special interest group, which will be a rich source for sharing information and expertise. Qualitative research very much takes forward the banner of patient-centered research providing depth and a perspective that cannot be obtained by quantitative research alone. At the 2005 meeting interest in a herbal medicine special interest group was also expressed. This is currently in the early stages of development; those interested should contact Dr Suzie Zick (szick@med.umich.edu). Third, if we are to engage researchers internationally we must make advance plans for our international conferences and expect to travel to people rather than expect them to travel to us (1–8). Therefore, after Edmonton (2006), conferences will be considered in various locations across continental Europe and Asia. We hope to have our conference plans for 2007 finalized prior to Christmas 2005, but at the moment Munich (Germany) looks a likely venue.

At our last Annual General Meeting, the Society took a very clear policy decision that it did not wish to seek commercial sponsorship in order to fulfill its goals. The membership made it quite apparent that our future strategy should be based on growth produced by membership fees and any income we might be able to earn from conferences rather than more overt sponsorship from publishers or product manufacturers and medicine distributors. Taking the moral high ground, however, comes at a price and that price must be the development of

membership growth in conjunction with a sustainable and happy membership.

How Can You Support Our Development?

If you wish to join ISCMR or if you are already a member of ISCMR and know of other research networks which you think might interest us, please contact us at info@iscmr.org. If you wish to contribute to our newsletters, book reviews or literature reviews, please also contact us at info@iscmr.org.

One of our aims for the future is to work towards ISCMR becoming an increasingly powerful body with a growing membership, within international complementary medical research. If we could achieve this, we believe that we would have the bargaining power to draw participants into international conferences and then be able to offer substantially decreased conference fees for those wishing to attend, thus allowing the creation of a mutually advantageous circle in which membership produces discounts, and vice versa. With your support our young Society may be able to achieve that, but only if you wish to take an active part in it and only if the membership continues to feel ownership and commitment towards ISCMR. Your Executive will continue to work for you free of charge sustaining administrative support for ISCMR through their own research groups. It is now up to you to use this research facility to further establish the organization over the next 2 years.

References

1. Cooper EL. 12th International Congress of Oriental Medicine: Main Themes • Oriental Medicine, Biotechnology in the Post-Genomic Era • WHO's Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005 Date: November 6–9, 2003. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2004;1:103–6.
2. Chang IL. Initiative for Developing Evidence-based Standardization of Traditional Chinese Medicine Therapy in the Western Pacific Region of the World Health Organization. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2004;1:337–42.
3. Ma SX. Acupuncture, Chinese Medicine in the Modern Age: WFAS Sixth World Conference on Acupuncture. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2005;2:243–6.
4. Jiang JY, Tang JL. The 3rd Asian Pacific Conference Medicine on EBM held on 25–28 November 2004. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2005;2:247–8.
5. Gauniyal AK, Rawat AKS, Pushpangadan P. Interactive Meeting for Evidence-Based Complementary, Alternative Medicines: Report. *Evid Based Complement and Alternat Med* 2005;2:249–52.
6. Olalde Rangel JA, del Castillo O. Report on the first International Congress on Systemic Medicine, Gas Discharge Visualization (GDV), Electro-concotherapy (ECT). *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2005;2:255–6.
7. Campoy JA, Muro A. Closing of the First International Congress on Complementary, Alternative Treatments in Cancer. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2005;2:411–2.
8. Roberti P. PINUS Association Symposium: 'Medicine, the New Paradigms of Science'. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2005;2:421–4.